

Unitarians respond to the vote

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THE UNITARIAN AND FREE CHRISTIAN PAPER

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*From the Object passed at the
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Inquiring Words

We think of agents, traffickers and facilitators as the worst abusers of refugees, but when they set out to extort from their clients, when they cheat them or dispatch them to their deaths, they are only enacting an entrepreneurial version of the disdain which refugees suffer at the hands of far more powerful enemies – those who terrorise them and those who are determined to keep them at arm's length. Human traffickers are simply vectors of the contempt which exists at the two poles of the asylum seeker's journey; they take their cue from the attitudes of warlords and dictators, on the one hand, and, on the other, of wealthy states whose citizens have learned to think of generosity as a vice.

– Jeremy Harding, *London Review of Books*, 3 February 2000

Minister's classics re-issued

By Derek McAuley

I was browsing in a bookshop in Belfast recently and attracted by the colour cover featuring the British Museum picked up 'Murder in the Museum'. Turning it over I saw the author, John Rowland, described as a Unitarian minister. The book has been re-released as part of the British Library Crime Classics series which is seeing the publication of long out-of-print books from the golden age of crime writing. Along with 'Murder in the Museum' another book by the author has been published; 'Calamity in Kent' with another lovely cover. I had to learn more.

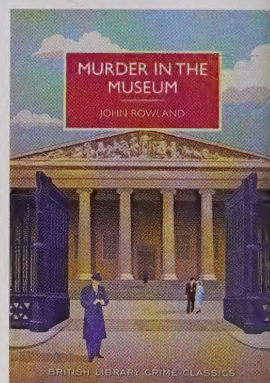
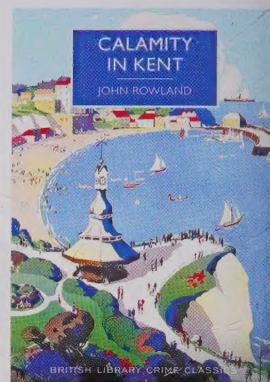
John Rowland was indeed a British Unitarian minister for 21 years (Brighton and Ditchling 1955 – 1965, Tenderden and Northiam 1965-1972 and Trowbridge 1973-1976). He died in 1984. He was a noted journalist, wrote for *The Inquirer* over many decades, was editor of *The Unitarian* for nine years and also for a period Publications Officer of the Lindsey Press, the in-house publications arm of the General Assembly. I then realised, for example, that he wrote the forward to 'A dream come true: The Story of Kharang' by Margaret Barr published in 1974.

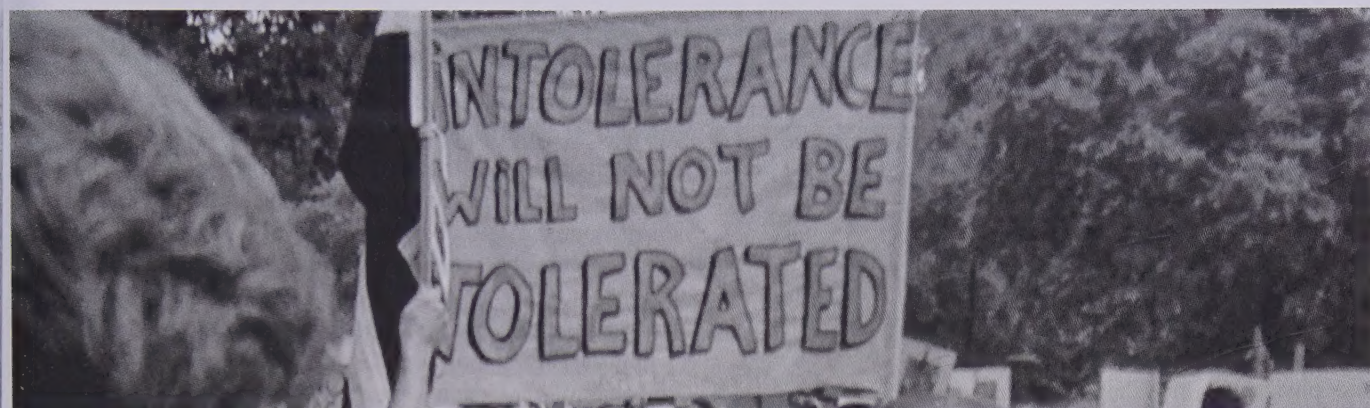
His career as a writer before entering ministry was impressive. In the early 1930s he was an editorial assistant at the publisher C Frederick Watts in London, who was closely associated with the Rationalist Press Association and for a period he was editor of 'The Free Thinker's Digest'. In a 15-year period he produced 23 crime novels, including 'Murder in the Museum' in 1938 and 'Calamity in Kent' in 1950. Others included the gloriously named 'Bloodshed in Bayswater' and 'Puzzle in Pyrotechnics'. He created his own fictional character called Herbert Shelley, which as Alan Ruston revealed in his history of *The Unitarian*, was based on his own middle names. He features in these re-issued books. John wrote other biographies and popular science books as well as a number of pamphlets on Unitarianism.

The Crime Classics series has been greeted with much delight. The Waterstones Blog highlights that; 'All of the books are rediscovered classics, so while the author's names may not be familiar to you, the stories are examples of crime writing at its finest. Intelligent, classy and usually very witty too, the books were all highly acclaimed in their day and are now finally regaining the attention they deserve. In fact, the skill with which they were written, coupled with the delight of their amusing plots, will make you wonder how they ever fell into obscurity in the first place.' The covers 'are beautifully designed with an elegant 1930's painting or drawing 'that will make you sigh for a bygone era of sophistication. They really are objects of beauty'.

So it's a real pleasure to see two of John Rowland's books back in print and widely available. I understand that John's daughter-in-law Barbara and grandchildren Jennifer and John were at the recent Foy Conference. To see the re-publication of these long-lost books must be a joyful surprise.

Derek McAuley is Chief Officer of the Unitarian General Assembly.





A poster at the 2 July 'March for Europe'. Photo by Yvonne Aburrow

Affirm inherent worth of all humans

By Derek McAuley

The result of the European Union Referendum has revealed a sharply divided nation and much dissatisfaction with the current political and economic system. Faith and community groups working on the ground have a responsibility to do all in their power to ensure communities stick together at this time of uncertainty and change.

We 'call out' the racism and xenophobia that have emerged from the shadows over the weekend with attacks on European and other perceived immigrants. Racism has no place in our multi-cultural and pluralist society in or out of the EU.

As Unitarians and Free Christians we have a longstanding commitment to civil and religious liberty believing in the

inherent worth of all human beings. We encourage our congregations and individual Unitarians to respond with compassion to those directly affected by intolerance and to join with others to build united local communities.

We call upon our government to reaffirm its commitment to the rights of refugees and asylum seekers under international law.

Derek McAuley is Chief Officer of the Unitarian General Assembly.



Unitarians must take a stand for the future

By Wyn Thomas

Following various deeply worrying events since the EU Referendum, I call on Unitarians and our supporters in Wales and further afield to put our values and ethos into practice.

We are at a point in our history as a nation when Freedom, Reason and Tolerance are needed more than ever within the communities we serve.

- We must use our democratic and moral freedom to express



our opinions publicly and without fear of reprisal.

- We must use our reason to take every opportunity to question everything we hear in this uncertain political climate.
- We must, above all else, exercise tolerance in our dealings with all people. Let us celebrate the wonderful and awe-inspiring variety of our communities, challenging xenophobia, racism, homophobia and political hatred wherever we encounter it.

Unitarians have a rich history of fighting social injustice. Let us embrace that history, and take a stand for our future.

The Rev Wyn Thomas is chair of Wales Unitarians.

Continuing to live by our principles

By Allan Warhurst

In the 4th century Chuang-tzu wrote:

"Thus, those who say that they would have right without its correlate, wrong, or good government without its correlate, misrule, do not apprehend the great principles of the universe, nor the nature of all creation. One might as well talk of the existence of Heaven without that of Earth, or of the negative principle without the – positive, which is clearly impossible. Yet people keep on discussing it without stop; such people must be either fools or knaves."

So I must be either a knave or a fool. My beliefs are currently a mishmash of Taoism and Buddhism (listening to a lot of Alan Watts on YouTube), yet I still worry about politics and what our human societies are doing. But those words above make me pause and remind me to refocus on the here and now.

Every day we make countless decisions, the consequences

of which ripple out in ways we cannot predict or control.

Regardless of the referendum, broken democratic systems, and the frankly bizarre behaviour of people whose job is to make decisions on our behalf, we can live our Unitarian principles in those small daily acts: a kind word, a listening ear, a hug, a gift unlooked for, a smile to a stranger. We can also stand for those principles we wish to see reflected in the world through social justice work, partnerships with like-minded local groups, and working to build community where others might tear it down.

Allan Warhurst is a Unitarian living in Leeds and is a member of the Foy Society.



Our democracy has been trampled

By Dot Hewerdine

The Referendum vote to leave the European Union seems to have caught many people on both sides by surprise and unprepared for what to do next. For me, that surprise was nothing compared with the surprise, indeed shock, caused by the aggressive responses, both verbal and physical, which have dominated the headlines ever since.

I have read language on social media which has horrified and saddened me. And some of it has come from people I know and respect (maybe that should now read knew and respected). There seems to be a need to vent feelings, to lay blame at the door of anyone else and to abdicate responsibility for the divisions which have opened up. Those divisions are not only racist in nature, but also now ageist with the young blaming the 'baby boomers.' The North/South divide has also come to the fore in this culture of blame as has the 'educated' against the 'uneducated'. Some of this has been based on a comparison of the demographics of particular areas relative to the percentage vote for or against Brexit in that area. Inevitably, this has led to generalisations which have fuelled the divisions.



There is an African proverb which says, 'When two bull elephants fight, it is the grass that suffers.' In the last 10 days, as our political parties face internal struggles and people throughout the UK observe the deeply disturbing behaviour and language of some voters on both sides of the referendum, it has felt, at times, as though the 'grass' which is our democracy has been trampled on and turned to mud.

I thoroughly support the message put out by Derek McAuley on behalf of our General Assembly stating our 'commitment to civil and religious liberty believing in the inherent worth of all human beings.' The political future in the UK and Europe is uncertain but our tolerance, compassion and belief in equality are not.

Civil rights leader, Jesse Jackson, said, 'Leadership has a harder job than to choose sides. It must bring sides together.' Whether we individually voted for or against Brexit, as Unitarians and Free Christians we now have a responsibility to show our leadership by helping those in our local communities most affected by the outcome, calming feelings and countering hatred and prejudice.

Dot Hewerdine is president of the Unitarian General Assembly.

Heavy-hearted witness to abuse

It is with a heavy heart that I write my response to the recent voting result of the EU Referendum. My heavy heart is not necessarily due to my own views on the matter, however, but it is due to the reaction to the vote.

My issue, as a Unitarian, Humanitarian, Egalitarian and human being, is with the rise in hate incidents within the UK in the weeks following the announcement of the results. I have seen, first-hand, the actions that individuals and groups have carried out, apparently in the name of so-called 'Brexit'.

This is not to say that I have anything against 'Brexiters' themselves or their views, as surely we all have a right to the freedom of opinion? What I do have an issue with is people taking the 'majority' vote (52% v 48%) and seeing this as a sign that racial hate speech is now acceptable within our society.

I'm not saying that the UK was perfect and free from hate crime pre-referendum, but I can promise you now that when a man shouts in the middle of the street 'we voted to leave, so get back to your own country', that is a clear indicator that the 'Brexit' vote has played some part in a minority's decision to vocalise their opinion that does not represent the majority and does not represent what I believe 'Brexit' was meant to be about.

I have personally been on the receiving end of torrents of abuse on the street after witnessing racist behaviour on the street and challenging individuals on their actions. I am white. I am English. But, because I stood up for individuals who are not both of those things, I was abused. I was sworn at and had

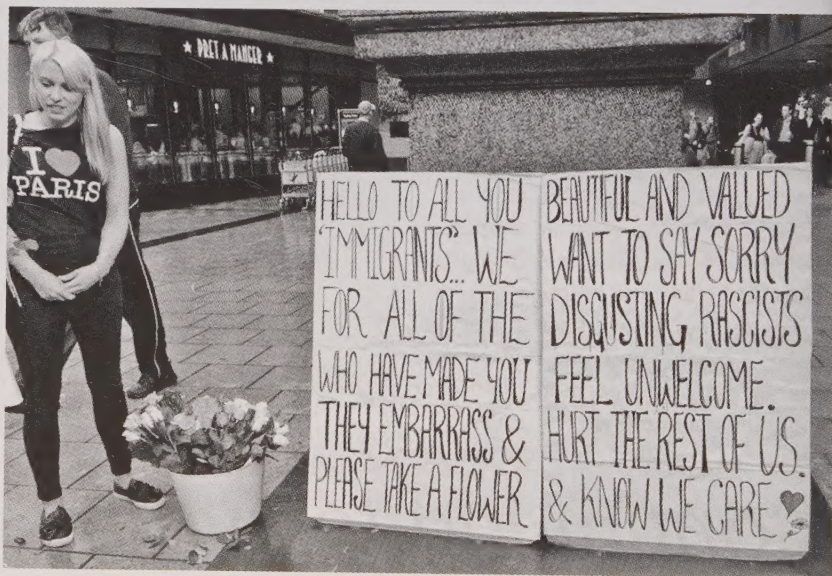


Photo of a recent scene at Euston Station posted by 'Hope not Hate' an organisation working against the politics of hate and extremism. See: www.hopenothate.org.uk

false statistics thrown at me that, for some reason, they believed justified discrimination, harassment and victimisation. Nothing justifies that kind of behaviour.

I think that, as open-minded and accepting members of a secular and diverse society such as the UK, we should stand together and celebrate our diversity alongside our fellow people, regardless of race, and show the unfortunately loud minority exactly how much we value every single person and the part they play in our communities.

Written by a 20-year-old Unitarian from Cheshire who grew up in the youth programme and, for professional reasons, asked to remain anonymous.

Time to ask, 'How are the neighbours?'

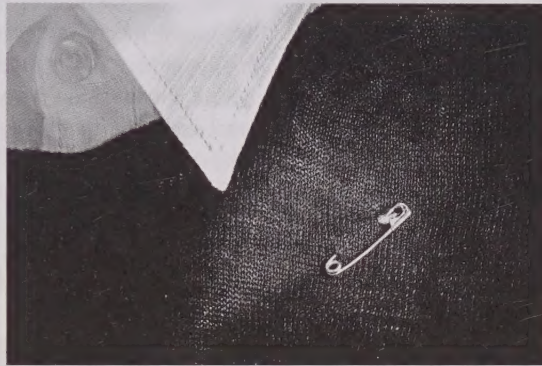
By Kate Dean

Lao Tzu wrote, 'If there is to be peace in the cities, there must be peace between neighbours.'

The current feelings of uncertainty may be more uncomfortable for some than for others, and that could be down to any number of factors – our background and upbringing, our personal attitudes to life, our experiences. There seems to be a plethora of responses to the referendum result: some distrustful, some hopeful, some shocking and some well-meaning. It is clear that the debate has had a profound effect on our country. In some areas, it has divided communities, pitting neighbour against neighbour or even drawing lines within families and friendship groups. People voted in different ways for many different reasons so it would be wrong to make assumptions about someone else's motivations. It is so much better to have the conversation, to listen with an open mind to the other point of view in order to try to understand it.

Now more than ever, we need to ask 'how are the neighbours?'

Thanks to my mixed ethnic heritage, I am often mistaken for many different nationalities until I open my mouth. Yesterday, someone – almost assuming – asked me whether I spoke Arabic. A few months ago, someone greeted me in Spanish! London, a city that has been welcoming people from many different lands for so many years, has tried to celebrate its multicultural



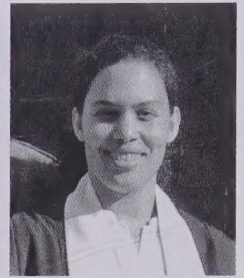
Many in the UK are wearing safety pins as a gesture to welcome immigrants and vulnerable others, representing themselves as a place of 'safety'.

identity. So it pains my heart deeply to think of some of our neighbours who now might be feeling unwelcome and may even have become victims of racist abuse.

Perhaps our neighbours are really a reflection of ourselves. And if that's the case then we should take seriously the concept of 'Loving thy Neighbour' and recognise that it goes both ways. We should treat others as we would wish to be treated, and if that is difficult, we need to look inside our under-loved selves and see what needs to change. Treat ourselves with compassion and treat others with compassion.

We Unitarians pride ourselves on being open-minded and compassionate as a spiritual community. Now is the time for us – as individuals and as a community – to consider how we will stand by these common values and live our faith through love and compassionate actions. I hope that we are all able to get to know our neighbours a little more, in whatever terms we define neighbour, not only to find out who are our neighbours but also to check in with them, and find out how they are.

The Rev Kate Dean is minister at Rosslyn Hill Chapel, Hampstead. This is an excerpt from her sermon delivered there on 3 July.



Shame on us! We gave up on peace

By Neville Kenyon

In 1973 I was invited, as a Liberal party activist, to address a public meeting sharing a platform with a Conservative supporter of the then-European Economic Community (EEC). Prime Minister Edward Heath took us into the EEC and a referendum in 1975 confirmed Britain's wish to ratify her membership.

Membership of the European project under its various titles has always resonated with my Unitarian beliefs so I was bitterly disappointed when the country voted in the recent referendum to 'Brexit' from the EU.

The decision to call a referendum was ill conceived. It was promised in the Conservative party manifesto at the 2015 general election as a concession to right-wing, anti-European Tory MPs who were challenging their leader as has been their wont. Democracy in this country is normally based on electing representatives who then proceed with legislation according to their party or conscience whilst bearing in mind that they are representing their constituents and may be thrown out at the next general election or even before.

When we view the chaotic aftermath, the motive for promising a referendum seems even more ridiculous and, as a result, our country has rejected what to me are essentially Unitarian values.

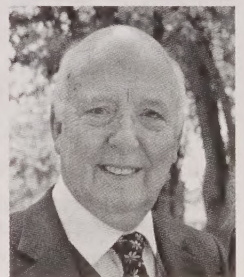
I am an internationalist and believe in the basic goodness of humankind of whatever ethnicity. I believe that it is crucial

for nations of different cultures to come together to establish groups with common purpose and ideals. Not only does this create political stability but allows the federations to deal more effectively with global threats such as terrorism and environmental challenges. But most importantly of all, I abhor the very thought of war between nations and any political grouping that helps to manage world peace surely has universal Unitarian support.

The European Union has many faults but I am reminded that in 1973 I supported Britain's entry into the EEC on the basis that its objects were profound and resonated with my Unitarian values. Those fundamental ideals remain and the peace dividend to me is the most important EU attainment of all. This has been so poignantly appreciated during the recent centenary commemorations of the Battle of the Somme. No one could now contemplate a repeat of the horrors of two World Wars centred on Europe. Despite this overwhelming benefit to the world, and a host of lesser ones all attributable to the EU, Britain has voted to pull out.

Shame on us!

Neville Kenyon is a member of Bury Unitarians.



Believers in Europe must continue fight

By Rich Daley

I know that as a Unitarian, it's really important to respect and learn from everyone's views, but on the morning of 23 June it was really hard to bring myself to do that. Like many others, I had campaigned fervently for the UK to remain in the Union and seeing the result felt like losing a limb. Seeing the chaos erupting in the following days – especially the increase in hate crime – only made things worse.

But as the dust begins to settle I started to realise something. It was the *campaign* that tore us apart, not the result. And this is where we as compassionate religious people need to be concentrating our efforts to repair the damage.

The official campaigns on both sides reflected the infighting in the Tory party. Both sides were conservative, backward-facing and intolerant. They were all concerned with how much better off 'Britain' will be, or how much 'you' as an individual voter will be. No thought for how much better a result will be for the rest of Europe, or for the millions of people who have left their homelands through choice or necessity, or even for the people of Northern Ireland!

I'm starting to realise that the increase in divisive rhetoric and 'other-blaming' would have happened even if the result had gone the other way.

The problems lie in allowing the politics of division, of us-and-them, to drown out the voices of freedom, compassion and tolerance. It is here where we should be pointing our fingers and where we should be concentrating our efforts to fix this new mess.

We know that our government held all the keys before the vote, and they hold all the keys now. We mustn't let the media circus of Brexit drown out our voices fighting against injustice such as plans to scrap the Human Rights Act, or the continued deaths of disabled people after having their benefits taken away. These things have been going on since long before this vote.

The way forward is to fight to shift public consensus back to liberal, compassionate values. Never again should a campaign be fought where the voices on both sides think the only thing people care about is themselves.

And those of us who believe in the European experiment must continue to support it and fight for it to succeed, for the sake of the other 87% of its population.

Rich Daley is a member of Cross Street Chapel, Manchester.



This feels like Broken Brexit Britain

By Yvonne Aburrow

I am really upset by the referendum result for several reasons. I think that the EU at its best is an attempt to come together to prevent war and conflict, and to work co-operatively on multi-national legal frameworks to protect human rights and the environment. I recognise that it has had moments of infamy, such as the way it treated Greece. But on the whole, I think it has been a force for good.

I was horrified by the overtly racist tone of the Leave campaign, and the huge surge in racist incidents after the result was announced. It is clearly not the case that all 17 million Leave voters are overtly racist, but the campaign focused heavily on immigration, and it is clear that people committing acts of racism and hate in the wake of the vote felt licensed to do so by the idea that 17 million people agreed with them.

No-one has gathered statistics about which way Pagans voted – but I have noticed a lot of Wiccan friends who voted to remain in the EU, partly I think because we have many friends in other European countries and many friends in the UK who are from other parts of Europe. Those Pagans I know who voted to Leave did so mostly for left-wing reasons (the capitalist nature of the EU), but there are likely to be Pagans who voted leave for nationalist or even anti-immigration reasons (and the same applies to Unitarians, I expect).

My view is that there are at least two Britains: one ('Little England') is xenophobic and grey and awful, and the other is vibrant, multicultural, international, and welcoming. Clearly Little England has got the upper hand in many parts



Yvonne Aburrow at the 2 July 'March for Europe' held in London. Photo provided by Yvonne Aburrow.

of England; but not in Scotland, which remains proudly European. It was also noticeable that parts of England which are ethnically diverse voted Remain, while those which are more overwhelmingly white voted Leave. Research indicates that diverse communities are less racist.

This referendum has massively polarised the UK, and exposed deep divisions between those who have a vision of Britain as diverse, inclusive, part of Europe, and open to the world; and those of more isolationist tendencies. I hope that the diverse and inclusive vision will prevail.

Yvonne Aburrow has been Pagan since 1985 and Wiccan since 1991. She is the author of several books and a friend to the Unitarian movement.

Table Service: the sacred meets the social

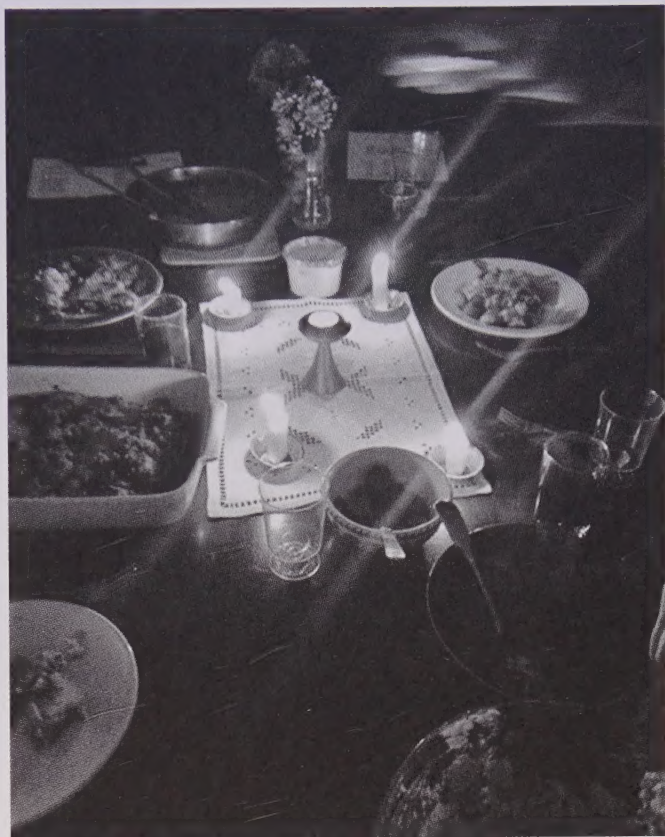
By Claire MacDonald

'With a loaf of bread and a cup shared I found fellowship,' a Viking saying, from the Danish Unitarian church

I don't know when it was that tables caught my spiritual imagination, but catch it they did. I could have caught my enthusiasm from Friday nights round the Shabbos table with my Jewish husband's family, lighting candles, reciting a quick prayer, and raising our glasses. It could have been earlier, learning to cook with my mum, or more recently, cooking with Simple Gifts lunch-making volunteers, where we joke that every Thursday it's like the loaves and fishes – somehow we make a lot from a little, and then we sit down together and share stories, news and conversation. Small wonder that tables are so central to the life of religious communities – from ritual wine and bread to volunteer food programmes. Churches and synagogues, mosques and temples all make and share food. It is the staff of life. So that when I began to think about ways to grow informal gatherings around the things we all do together everyday that also offer the space for spiritual connection and reflection, starting a regular Friday night table seemed the way to go – and so it has proved.

Table Service began as a series of short informal Friday evening services around a table which we laid together. Lighting candles and washing each others' hands, telling stories, bringing readings, and eating and clearing up together quickly emerged as a mindful practice which could be easily shared. People who came to those Friday nights in 2014 at New Unity in Islington didn't always want to come to a Sunday service. They liked the intimacy of gathering around a table, in the peace and beauty of candlelight and, for people on their own, eating a simple meal together can be a much much nicer occasion to end the week than sitting on your own.

In 2015 I brought Table Service to Simple Gifts in Bethnal Green's Mansford Street. Simple Gifts has been growing communal tables for years – lunch tables, picnics, parties and gatherings that bring the local community together; that have shown just how much cooking talent there is in the community in Tower Hamlets, and how much appetite for gathering, talking and sharing. Table Service seemed to fit the ethics of sharing and offering a welcome to all and so we now base it there – and we also go out and take Table Service elsewhere. We have held a Table Service in Lewisham, where we shared the order of service with a Jewish friend, John Heyderman, who led prayers and blessings. We have had big Table Services. Last November we had 30 people round a table to raise money for Kirby Costa Campos and Sophie Yau to support their work with refugees in Leros. Last Sunday we held Table Service again at Simple Gifts. We had students and local community volunteers, Unitarian friends from afar, and people sent to us unexpected items of food – a hunk of parmesan cheese, ripe strawberries, mangoes, and of course bottles of wine. And we sang. We sang *Amazing Grace* and a Hebrew round. We had blessings in languages we didn't know, and we said to one another that we were learning to share our differences as well as our agreements. We were not all Unitarians by any means, but people of many faiths and none. Best of all, we heard from the two new community gardeners at the back of the church who are working with the local community to grow food – that we hope to share in the autumn around our table.



The table is ready for the service. Photo by Claire MacDonald

Our tables are real, everyday, special, sacred and full of food – and they have something more. The business man and leadership coach, Peter Hawkins, has written – in the new Unitarian essay collection *Living with Integrity* – about bringing empty chairs into organisational meetings to enable those present to 'hear' the voices of those who are absent and silent. At times he brings in a chair for 'our collective grandchildren' who will reap the consequences of decisions made today. At Passover we set a place for Elijah, or for feminists, for Miriam. At Table Service we lay an extra place, we pull up an extra chair. We invite donations for those who cannot come to the table, and we gather them in micro pockets, small amounts that allow us to widen the circle of who is present with us, for us and around us. One recent Sunday, for instance, we raised money for the White Helmets and Hope Not Hate, two charities that Jo Cox supported.

All of you are welcome at the table. And all of you are welcome to take the idea, to make it yours, to add it on to what you are doing, to send us ideas and invite us to create a table that can also nourish us all with plans, ideas, projects and stories of what you and all of us are doing, together in that space where the sacred and the social meet.

Kirby Costa Campos and I are building the Table Service web site right now, and we will launch it in October. If you would like to come to Table Service, host one, have a 'how to' leaflet on holding one of your own, or just to share a story, please email me on stilljustclaire@icloud.com.

Claire MacDonald lives in London and is training for Unitarian Ministry.

Youth programme Roadshow at Hinckley



Seven young folk came together at Hinckley Great Meeting Unitarian Chapel along with youth leaders the Rev John Harley and Caroline Boyce in May for a day of fun activities designed to give them a flavour of what to expect at Junior Weekends at Great Hucklow or other events planned for their age-range in the Youth Programme.

Within a few moments after a quiet start it was clear the excitement level was rising, lunch was over in a flash and the youngsters were keen to get on with part two of the day, which involved making hand puppets, creating short puppet shows based on the Aesop's fables and then presenting them to the adults and other group members.

Finally the group sat in a circle of friendship and using the traditional ball of wool created a web by crisscrossing the ball from person to person to create a web of connection, which was then cut to make wrist bracelets as a reminder of the day.

– Mike Everton

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A few words from John Harley: Thanks to Caroline for helping to run such a fun day. Roadshows are designed to give congregations and districts a taste of youth weekends at the Nightingale Centre. Usually they consist of a Saturday workshop, though this is not the only model. Youth leaders are aware that it can be a big step for children and young people to come along to a whole youth weekend if they have never experienced one before. If you would like to host a Youth Programme Roadshow, let us know. Contact John at jharley@unitarian.org.uk



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For information pack please contact:
Roger Hartley – email: roger.m.hartley@gmail.com
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St. Mark's Unitarian Church
7 Castle Terrace
Edinburgh
EH1 2DP

No gold watch for leaving the EU

When my father retired from work he received a gold watch. This was the traditional gift for recognition of long service, often 50 years. Many companies had their own version of the watch, engraved with such words as, 'You have given us your time, we now give you ours'.

It's a custom that has almost disappeared. In our rapidly changing world, few people stay in the same job or with the same company for long enough. It is in my mind because at about this time, I am celebrating 50 years as a Unitarian minister. It has been for me almost a complete lifetime career. I am saying, 'at about this time' as there is a bit of a mystery here. When exactly does a person become a minister?

Unlike the more traditional Christian denominations, we do not have ordination by the laying on of hands by a bishop, which, it is believed, makes a person from that moment a priest. It is based on the tradition of the 'apostolic succession', the somewhat flimsy notion that all Christian priests can trace their ordination back to the Apostle Peter. What then, is the equivalent moment for a Unitarian minister? There are several possible answers. Some say that, having been a student at one of our Colleges, as soon as you complete your training and receive the College Certificate, you are a minister. Is that the moment?

Another point of view says, 'No, it isn't.' We don't have ordination by a bishop, we operate in the congregational system. A person becomes a minister when they are appointed by their first congregation; called, the traditional thought has it, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

For this there will be an induction ceremony, and the significant moment comes when the chair of the congregation calls the prospective minister to accept the ministry. He or she then offers the Right Hand of Fellowship to the candidate, and that is when a person becomes a minister. Is *that* the moment?

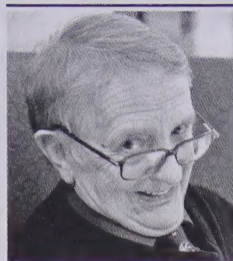
Others say, 'No, not quite. We are a denomination; we have a central organisation as well as local congregations.

Our central body has a Roll of Ministers, which is important. For all sorts of legal and practical reasons, a minister needs to be 'in good standing' on that Roll of Ministers of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches. This involves consideration by at least two committees. The candidate then receives a confirming letter (Is *that* the moment?).

Each year at the Annual Meetings of our General Assembly, there is a ceremony, recently enhanced in form, and part of the Anniversary Service, welcoming new ministers and adding their names to that roll. Some say *that's* when you become a minister.

Which of these is it? Leaving college, confirmation in writing from Essex Hall, an appointment to a congregation or having one's name entered on the Roll? There are practical problems to consider. On leaving Unitarian College in June 1966, I received (with joy) my Valediction, a warm handshake from the College Principal, College President and General Assembly President.

But I didn't get my certificate until some weeks later. I began my first ministry on July 1st, but the Induction Service, with the 'right hand of fellowship', came some weeks after that. My



Funny Old World

By John Midgley

formal welcome onto the Roll of Ministers came later still. So, when was 'the moment'? There is no definite answer to that question. And I don't mind, though I suspect many people do.

As I see it, becoming a minister is a process with a number of stages in it. I received good wishes from my ministry colleagues and many other people on all these occasions. At each stage the sense of being a minister grew stronger. I even remember reading of a man who said that what clinched it for him, the moment he *knew* he had become a minister, was when the caretaker at his first congregation gave him a key to the chapel front door!

I recognised that, and smiled. It doesn't answer all the questions, such as, 'If a person is unable to get an appointment or ceases to have one, do they cease to be a minister?' I think not. The orthodox belief is, 'Once a priest, always a priest.' I can certainly understand, 'Once a minister, always a minister.' One day I shall ask someone who has quit the ranks, 'When did you know that you were no longer a minister?' The answer to that may be equally complex and unclear.

News of the EU Referendum result and the aftermath has had my head spinning. In an attempt to dredge something amusing from it all, along with one *Guardian* writer who consulted some comedians (unsuccessfully) for something to lift the gloom, I found myself sharing the thought of columnist Zoe Williams. 'As the implications of the referendum result kick in, all you want to do is go back to bed and emigrate. You can't do those things – definitely not simultaneously.' I sympathised with that.

Next best thing and a more positive response has been to start packing my bags for the July gathering of the International Council of Unitarian and Universalists. A dose of internationalism always cheers me up. Off I go then, to the Netherlands, though I can't help wondering if I shall get any grumpy looks at the border. I shall feel comfortable enough, I am sure, once I get to the conference, and I'm looking forward to it enormously. Over 140 participants from nearly 30 different countries, including the Rev Fulgence Ndagijimana from troubled Burundi, of whom I have written previously. He now lives in exile in Canada, supported by Montreal Unitarians. The second part of the gathering is a conference for ministers. There I shall take great pleasure in boasting to them of my 50 years of service. I'm sure I shall get kindly congratulations, but I shall still not expect a gold watch.

The Rev John Midgley is a retired Unitarian minister.

Letters to the Editor

EC seeks volunteers for skills database

To the Editor:

The Executive Committee of the Unitarian General Assembly is currently compiling a database of potential volunteers for the GA. This is one of the outcomes of the Vision Day-Next Steps session held in Sheffield. The idea of having a pool of volunteers is to provide a database which could be accessed to identify specific individuals, for specific projects, programmes, or activities. These would be pieces of work, with a given remit, and of time limited duration, e.g. conducting reviews, interviews, etc. Being included in this pool would not commit you in any way, we know that at any given time people can have more than they can handle, and it may not be the time for you to take on another task, but there again it may just be that you do have some time, and the project is something where you feel able to make a significant contribution.

We recognise that many of you are heavily involved in your own Churches and Chapels, and many of you also have commitments outwith our movement, but we also recognise that within our membership there are people with skills, knowledge and expertise which the movement as a whole could benefit from, even more so than it does presently.

If you do feel you would be prepared to have your name included, please let me have your contact details, at joancook@hotmail.co.uk (e-mail preferred) and a note of your particular skills, knowledge or experience.

I hope to hear from you soon.

To those of you who have already responded, thank you!

Joan Cook

Member of the Unitarian General Assembly Executive Committee and is an Associate Member

If we don't have consciousness control, why bother?

To the Editor:

In the 18 June issue Paul Vincent expresses the view that 'All human thought stems from the chemical and electrical activity in our brains.' Surely

this summary dismissal of the realm of consciousness doesn't make sense and is therefore not rational, as claimed.

To begin with: we are situated in a vast world of nature: sunrise and storm, our relationships with water and light, animals and mountains, not to mention other people, all influence what we think and feel, and how we act. How could this complex and open-ended reality possibly be reduced to deterministic chemical and electrical activity taking place in the brain, that small chunk of matter within the skull? What we are conscious of is indeed meaning and not electrical brain activity. Consciousness, although immaterial in itself, is constantly making a difference in the material world. To illustrate: if someone says, or writes, 'I love you' (or indeed 'I hate you') in a language you understand, your reactions and feelings will be a response to the meaning, not to the material nature of the statement.

The question for the materialist is: if everything you perceive, feel and think is the result of impersonal physical laws operating inside the brain, and beyond any degree of conscious control, then why bother about anything? Just let the chemistry take over and deny all responsibility. This is not consistent with being a moral agent or a recognisably human being.

Christine Avery

Plymouth Unitarians

Unitarian documents are held locally

To the Editor:

Mike Barber (letter, *The Inquirer*, 18 June) and others interested in conserving the records of Unitarian churches and societies may be pleased to learn that since 1981 it has been General Assembly policy to encourage the deposit of records and archives with local authority and other recognised archive repositories.

The 1981 resolution was accompanied by a programme of inquiry and of encouragement regarding the safe keeping of the records and archives of congregations and societies carried out by the Unitarian Historical Society. Many Unitarian congregations and societies have made safe deposits of their records and archives many of

which would, otherwise, have been inevitably lost. Those interested in wondering where a particular congregation's or a specific society's records are safely kept should first go to the Unitarian Historical Society's website where they will find a location list. It is also worth checking with the National Archives Discovery Chanel (formerly A2A) which now provides often quite detailed on-line information of the records of particular churches.

Andrew M Hill

Mover of the 1981 resolution
York

Services in the round a way forward

To the Editor:

I invited a friend to take part in a morning service in the round, where the congregation are invited to speak on a subject or bring readings or prayers on the same subject.

She is very firm in her desire never to be committed to a church, but when she realised it was PARTICIPATORY (her words) her eyes lit up and she said 'I will come, but of course as a one-off.' Doesn't this say something about the way forward for our movement?

Brenda Knopf

Southampton

Faith in Words

The annual summer issue of worship material, stories and meditations is coming up. Please send in prayers, addresses, meditations, art work, photographs – anything which is an expression of your faith – to *The Inquirer*.

For more information or to submit material, email: **Inquirer@btinternet.com** Or, use the editor's postal address on page 2.

**Material is due by
27 July**

Unitarian connection to suffrage memorial

By Jane Aaronson

I was privileged, on 7 June, to attend the unveiling, in the House of Commons, of an outstanding new artwork, commemorating women's suffrage. On that date 150 years ago, John Stuart Mills petitioned Parliament, on behalf of the suffragette movement, in favour of granting women the right to vote, to have 'a voice in determining who shall be their rulers'. It is incredible that it has taken so long for the suffrage movement to be celebrated in this way. But the wait has been worthwhile, as the artwork has a timeless quality to it.

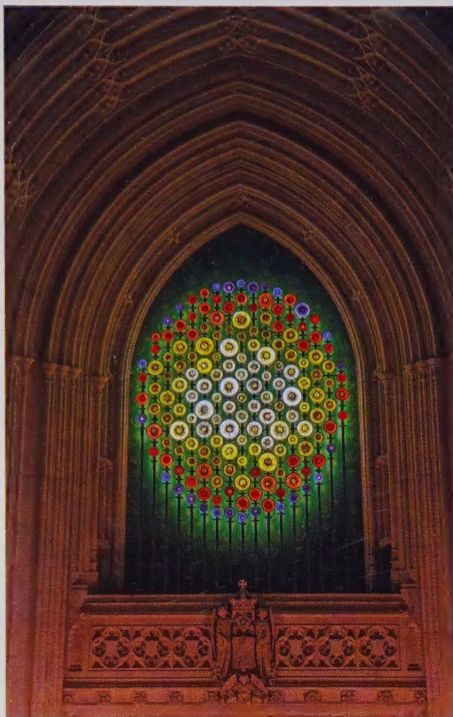
New Dawn was the brainchild of Mary Branson, who for more than two years had been Parliament's 'artist-in-residence' for women's suffrage. The Speaker's Advisory Committee on Works of Art had commissioned her to develop a proposal for a 'site-specific work to be placed in a permanent location in the Palace of Westminster as part of the Parliamentary Art Collection'. The private view was a most enjoyable occasion, heightened by an added layer of the positive sense that the history of women's suffrage was being suitably acknowledged

This magnificent artwork measures six metres by four metres and it is filled with history and symbolism. As its name, *New Dawn* suggests, it signifies a new beginning; and indeed the suffragettes saw their movement as being a 'new dawn'. Significantly, it has been installed above the entrance to St Stephen's Hall. When the suffragettes petitioned Parliament all those years ago, they were barred from entering any further than the entrance to St Stephen's Hall. Fortunately, matters have changed since then and women now have the vote and can stand as MPs, but there is still more work to be done.

New Dawn is a light sculpture made from hand blown glass scrolls set in a metal "portcullis". The colours of the glass scrolls are historically interesting. They reflect the coloured banners of the many organisations which spoke up, including the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, the Women's Social and Political Union, the Women's Freedom League and the Men's League for Women's Suffrage.

New Dawn is unusual in that it is a dynamic artwork and it is programmed to change over a 12-hour cycle that is governed by the ebb and flow of the tides of the River Thames. The historical significance of this is that the suffragette movement regarded itself as being on the rising tide of change, and the clock would not be turned back. The journey was still to be a long and tortuous one, but there was no going back and eventually women gained the vote.

To enable Mary Branson to make her vision of *New Dawn* into a reality, she enlisted the help of a number of leading craftsmen, including my brother, Adam Aaronson, who, like me, was brought up as a Unitarian. As children



'New Dawn' photo by Emma Brown:
www.emmabrownphotography.co.uk

we worshipped in the Ilford Unitarian Church, where the late Rev Tom Dalton was our minister.

Around 25 years ago, Adam designed and created the glass chalice which we use in St. Mark's, the church I attend in Edinburgh. Referring to the inspiration for the chalice, Adam stated that he wanted 'to create an interpretation of the chalice, normally seen in two dimensions in print, in three dimensions'. 'However, I also wanted to refer to an extra dimension that can often be found in my work – the concept of looking beneath the surface. So in making the cup of the chalice, I intentionally used a complex series of overlays of different colours in order to cut through the surface to reveal inner depths. Sometimes, I think of this concept as a metaphor for not judging by appearances but it can also have a deeper meaning, representing a search for an inner light. Thus, while the chalice can be rotated through different angles, my preference is for the cut surface to be displayed at the front'.

Now, returning to the present day, and *New Dawn*, Adam created the glass scrolls for *New Dawn*. Mary Branson states that the inspiration for the scrolls is 'a direct reference to the Original Act Room in the Parliamentary Archives' where all the legislation and petitions to parliament in our history are housed, written on vellum scrolls. Contained in these scrolls is the legislation which brought women the vote and a say in the laws that govern as well as the petitions of all the campaigners.

The hand-blown glass scrolls are of varying sizes. Each of the 168 unique glass discs was hand-blown and carefully 'spun' to open them out flat. To produce the scroll pattern, Adam applied powdered glass colours and silver leaf to the molten glass at specific points in the process. A film that documents the process can be found here: <http://bit.ly/29cmkiV>

Father and son team, Ian and Colin Musson produced the supporting metal work of *New Dawn*, which is in the shape of a portcullis and Chris Wilson of WLX Productions produced the lighting programme, which, as mentioned, is on a twelve-hour cycle.

When I first saw *New Dawn*, I was quite overwhelmed. Indeed it is beautiful and great craftsmanship has gone into creating it, but its beauty is transcended by the history that it symbolises. Mary Branson states that 'the installation is not meant to be seen in a social vacuum, it is as much a tribute to today's equivalent'. How wonderful to have such a monument to inspire us.

To see the completed work and how it changes intensity with the tides of the Thames see: www.marybranson.co.uk/new-dawn/ and scroll down to the bottom of the page.

Jane Aaronson is a member of St Mark's Unitarians in Edinburgh.



Edinburgh's Peace Chalice made by Adam Aaronson. Photo by Jon Bagust

London Unitarians marched with Pride



By Ed Fordham

Greetings to our friends from far and wide as we gathered on Saturday 25th June – and indeed it was from far and wide that we Unitarians gathered in Central London to march in the Pride in London 2016 Parade.

Led by the Revs Martin Whitell, Daniel Costley and Kate Dean we gathered – 37 in all – and walked through the million and more gathered LGBT supporters. To be cheered, screamed and welcomed like old friends is one of the most amazing and invigorating things ever and we were made welcome, very welcome.

All of us were festooned in matching orange t-shirts, each cut and

tied or torn to fit or make fashionable. Cross-matched with silver sashes proclaiming Unitarians for Equality. Carrying our banner reading: 'Unitarians Welcome All God's Children'.

Walking like this for three hours can seem boring so we were additionally kitted out with our flags – a UK flag, a USA flag, the flag of Florida and of course rainbow flags – at first our team members were coy but seeing

and sensing the warmth of the welcome soon flags were aloft and arms waving warmly. Further, thanks to the investment of the London District, we had a brand-new set of eight large bold rainbow flags adorning our chalice and then four differing messages: 'Unitarians Support Equality', 'Unitarians Marry in Church', 'Unitarians Welcome Refugees' and appealing directly to our audience 'You Can Marry in a Unitarian Church'.

If we felt bold and brave, then pause to think of those in front of Imaan the Gay Muslim Support Group and behind us the Support Group for LGBT Immigrant and Asylum seekers.

There was an attempt at rain, but this parade was not going to be put off and we danced and waved and weaved our way on. It was a pleasure and a joy to have so many from so many different congregations. If your city has a Pride event soon, book a place to ensure the Unitarians are seen and heard.

If you want or need any support or advice, we in the London District would be willing to help and warn of pitfalls we have learnt from and now avoid. Drop me a line on Ed.fordham@gmail.com

Ed Fordham is a member of Rosslyn Hill Unitarian Church, Hampstead. Main photo by Daniel Costley. Other photos provided by Derek McAuley (left).

